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Margaret I. Liston  
*Iowa State College*

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# Your Water Supply - - From Bucket or Faucet?

by Margaret I. Liston

**F**ARM FAMILIES need water dozens of times a day—for drinking and cooking; for dish-washing, laundry and cleaning houses; for washing hands and for bathing; and for many other uses.

Yet less than half of the farm families in the United States can get the water they need from a faucet in the kitchen, bathroom or basement. Most farm families must still get their water from a pail which must be filled and carried in and out of the house several times a day.

The Bureau of the Census has just released some information about farm housing in the United States. Reports on farm housing in Iowa alone haven't yet been received. But in the meantime, the 1940 and 1945 census reports can furnish some background for interpreting the farm family water situation in Iowa.

It's probable that about half of our farm families in Iowa now have running water in their houses. But this means that about one of every two Iowa farm families still has the drudgery of carrying into the house daily the gallons and gallons of water needed.

## Getting Better

But the situation is getting better all the time. In 1945 one of every three Iowa farm families had running water in their homes—while in 1940 only one out of five enjoyed running water.

The situation is different in various parts of the state. If you live in west-central Iowa, chances are one in two that your farm has running water in the house. If you live in south-central Iowa, your chances are only about one in five.

MARGARET I. LISTON is professor of consumption economics and home management.

## What Are Causes?

Why was this increase in water facilities so small where the need was apparently greatest? Is the amount of improvement related to the economic status of the farm families in these counties? And, as a sidelight, were the counties rating low in water facilities in farm-houses also low in electricity and mechanical refrigeration?

For simplicity, let's consider only the 49 shaded counties in fig. 1—the ones lowest in percentage of farm dwellings having running water in 1945. Thirty-five of these counties were below the state median in value of land and buildings per acre; 34 were below the median county index for crop yields as reported by the Iowa Department of Agriculture; and 31 had percentages of farms with electricity below the state median.

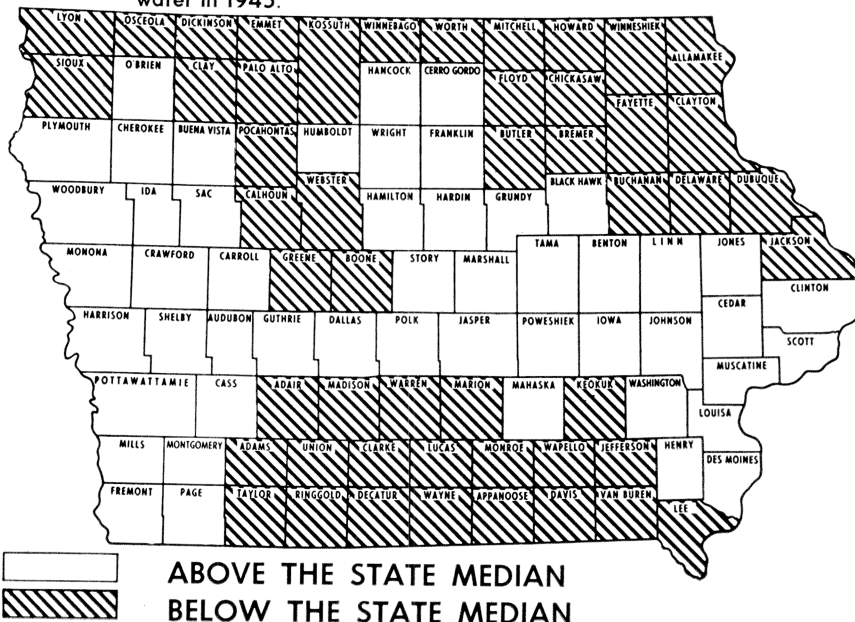
So about two-thirds of the counties low in running water were also low in value of land and buildings, crop yields and in availability of electricity in the farmhouse. However, 13 of the counties relatively low in percentage of farm-houses having running water were above the state average in the other factors. These counties are located mainly in the west-north-central part of the state (see fig. 2).

Now let's look at the 49 counties above the state median of 31 per-

In 1945 the median or middle-most county in percentage of farm dwellings with running water was Louisa with 31 percent. In other words, there were just as many counties with more than 31 percent as there were with less than 31 percent. The shaded counties in fig. 1 are those whose percentages were lower than the 31-percent median. The unshaded counties are those above 31 percent.

Although this pattern was much like it had been in 1940, the median had risen from 20 percent in 1940 to 31 percent in 1945. During that 5-year period, 47 of the 99 counties of the state increased the proportion of their farmhouses having running water by 10 or more percent. Thirty-eight of these 47 counties were those already relatively high in percentage of farmhouses having running water. Only 9 of the 47 were counties that had relatively small proportions of farmhouses with running water.

**Fig. 1** Counties above and below the state median of 31 percent of farmhouses having running water in 1945.

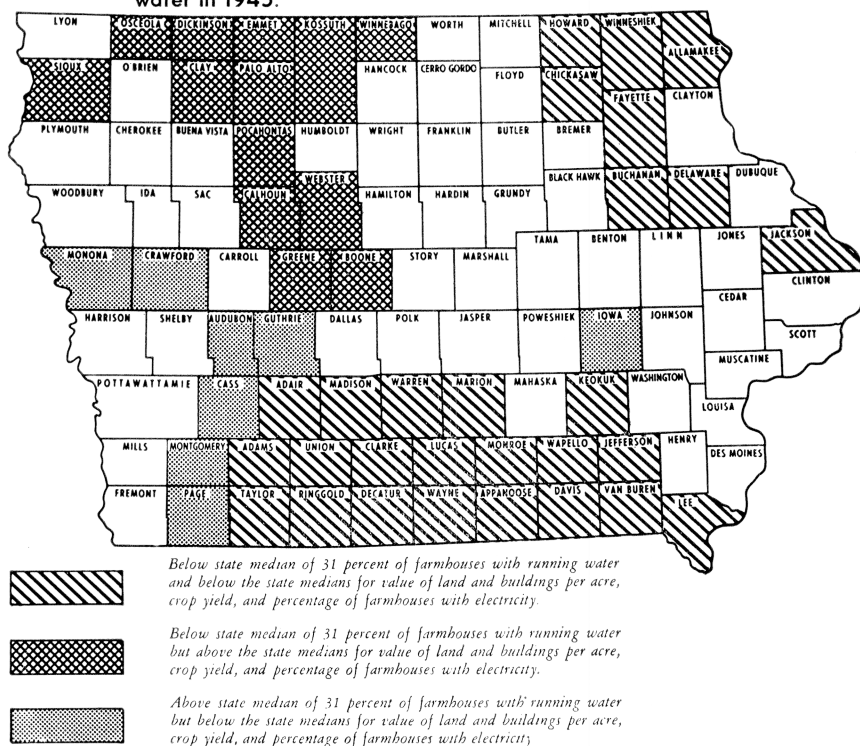


cent of farm dwellings with running water in 1945. From 31 to 34 of these counties also were high in value of land and buildings per

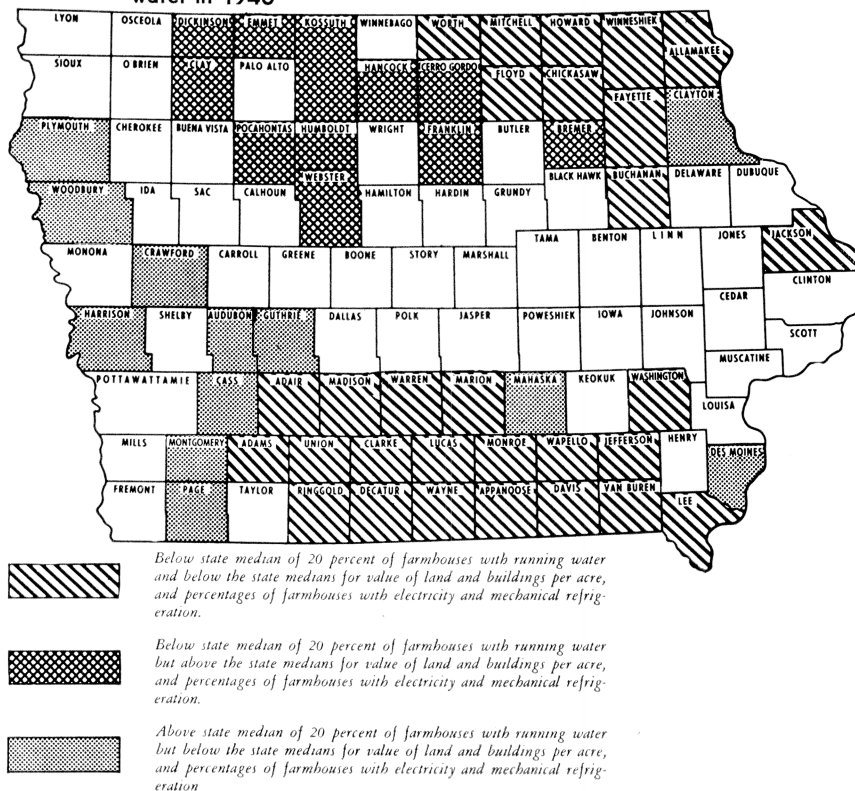
acre, crop yields and electricity in the home. But Audubon, Cass, Crawford, Guthrie, Iowa, Monona, Montgomery and Page counties

ranked above the median in farmhouses with running water—even though below the state averages for land value, crop yields and electricity.

**Fig. 2** Relation of selected economic characteristics to percentage of farmhouses with running water in 1945.



**Fig. 3** Relation of selected economic characteristics to percentage of farmhouses with running water in 1940



In 1940 several of the counties above average in value of land and buildings per acre as well as in the percentages of farmhouses having electricity and mechanical refrigeration were below average in percentage of farmhouses with running water (see fig. 3). On the other hand, 11 of the counties had high percentages for running water in spite of the fact that they were below the state medians in value of land, house electrification and mechanical refrigeration.

So some farm families insist upon running water in the house even if their resources are limited. Other families who are relatively "well-off" choose to get along without this important facility. Why? When the 1950 census data are released for Iowa, we'll be able to explore this problem more deeply to see if we can find some of the reasons.

## What Can Be Done?

What can we do to increase the proportions of Iowa farmhouses with running water? Unless serious shortages develop for building and plumbing materials, two lines of action could result in more improvement during the 1950's than took place in the 40's.

Farm families who don't have running water in their houses should think seriously of the advantages and disadvantages of such an investment. Iowa State College Bulletin P94, *Running Water for Your Farm Home*, may be helpful in considering possibilities.

Educational, service and business groups interested in helping Iowa families improve their living conditions could develop programs to arouse interest and serious consideration.

Farm families who find it impossible or inadvisable to install running water in their houses could be aided in finding more convenient ways of getting water into the house—and to work out more efficient arrangements for using the water pail supply in family living.